MIDDLE EAST CONTEMPORARY SURVEY

Volume XXIV

2000

BRUCE MADDY-WEITZMAN
Editor

**The Moshe Dayan Center
for Middle Eastern and African Studies
The Shiloah Institute
Tel Aviv University**

Copyrighted material

The Middle East in 2000: Things Come Undone

MARTIN KRAMER

In the first year of the new millennium, the Middle East turned back the clock. An intense diplomatic effort to resolve the very essence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict failed. By the year's end, the two parties were locked in a violent confrontation. This was no repetition of history, but the casual observer could be excused for thinking that 2000 looked like a rerun of 1987, or 1982, or 1967, or 1948, or 1936, or 1929. At various moments, the renewed confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians evoked each of these past landmarks in their long history of confrontation. And this round, like its predecessors, promised to be bloody and impassioned, superficially decisive but fundamentally inconclusive.

The US also sustained damages in the crash. This was the last year of the presidency of Bill Clinton, a man who had put his heart and mind into the effort to bring peace. His failure was not a matter of too little involvement, but of too much. As his own political clock ran down, his urgency only raised the stakes still higher, culminating in a marathon three-way summit at Camp David. This presidential retreat, long associated with Egyptian-Israeli peace, would ever more be remembered as the place where Palestinian-Israeli relations went into a tailspin. For the US, the debacle posed a new challenge to its prestige as sole hegemon.

Even before the meltdown, the attempt to bring Israel and Syria over the threshold also failed, followed a short time later by the death of Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad. The prospect of a Syrian-Israeli peace receded, but Israel did end its twenty-two-year occupation of South Lebanon, removing at least one point of friction. Israelis would remember this as the one major achievement of Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak — if they could ignore its negative impact on Israel's deterrent posture in Arab eyes.

In the Arab world, there was concern about the dangerous turn in Israeli-Palestinian relations. But nowhere did it have a destabilizing effect. Asad on his death was succeeded by his son, Bashshar, in a process that demonstrated the deep personalization of Arab politics. Saddam Husayn of Iraq survived yet another year of sanctions, and the debate in the West over their efficacy grew heated. Elsewhere, it was politics (or, more precisely, the absence of politics) as usual. But in Iran and Turkey, arenas of genuine political contestation, the struggle over priorities intensified, as both countries wrestled with the need for reforms.

Did anyone prosper in the Middle East in 2000? In September, the price of oil hit a ten-year high of almost $37/b. In desert palaces and Swiss banks, coffers overflowed.

Copyrighted material

SYRIA–ISRAEL

At the end of 1999, American mediation had finally provided a formula for a renewal of Israeli-Syrian negotiations, the first since 1996 (see *MECS* 1999, pp. 64–68). The talks took place from 3–11 January in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, between Israeli prime minister Barak and Syrian foreign minister Faruq al-Shar'. The two men never shook hands.

The state of the negotiations became clear following the leak of a confidential US bridging document, which the Americans presented to both sides at the close of the talks, and which was promptly leaked to an Israeli newspaper. On many issues — normal relations, security, water — there had been progress. But the document, by its omissions, also made it evident that the core territorial issue had not been resolved.[1]

Syria insisted on a return to the "line of 4 June 1967," comprised of positions Syria held on the eve of the 1967 war. This included the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, which Syria had occupied in 1948. Asad was wont to tell of how, as a young officer, he swam in the lake and cooked fish on its shores. Syria demanded a return to those shores, and the rights of a riparian state.[2]

But the "line of 4 June 1967" was not the international border which Britain and France had established between British-mandated Palestine and French-mandated Syria in 1923. That line had placed the whole of the lake in Palestine. It was Israel's position that Israel had exclusive right to control of the lake — the principal source of Israel's water. The late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin had been willing to accept a face-saving gesture: Israel would accept "4 June" as a basis. But since no such line existed on any map, it would have to be negotiated. In such a negotiation, Israel would insist that "4 June" be demarcated in such a way as to leave the entire lake in Israel.

No progress was made on this issue at Shepherdstown, and the Israeli leak of the American bridging document greatly embarrassed Syria, since it omitted the territorial *quid pro quo* of full Israeli withdrawal to the "line of 4 June." Syria immediately began to backtrack, engineering its own leaks to a Lebanese newspaper in order to rescind many supposed Syrian concessions.[3]

Clinton made a last effort to revive the negotiations on 26 March, when he met Asad for three hours in Geneva. Clinton again conveyed Israel's position on the lake; Asad replied by repeating his fish story to Clinton: "Until 1967, I would swim in the Sea of Galilee, I would have barbecues there, I ate fish."[4] The summit broke up in failure, with both Clinton and Asad believing they had been misled as to its chances for success.

The diplomatic train had reached the end of the Syrian track. Clinton decided to lay blame, announcing that Barak's proposal was "serious, detailed, and comprehensive." "The ball is in Syria's court now," he added, "and I'm looking forward to hearing from [Asad]."[5] But the chance for an Israeli-Syrian agreement had died, and it was buried with Asad himself, when he died some two weeks later (see below).

The precise history of this failure would be written by future historians. Was Israel short-sighted to insist on holding the last few hundred meters on the northeastern shore of the lake? Was Syria foolish in not stroking Israeli public opinion?[6] Whatever the verdict, it seemed unlikely that a similar exercise would be attempted any time soon. "The Syrian story is over," announced Barak. "The window of opportunity will be closed for a long time."[7]

Copyrighted material

ISRAEL EX-LEBANON

Barak, in his 1999 election campaign, had promised an Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon by the end of his first year as prime minister. His obvious preference was to end the twenty-two-year occupation in the framework of a peace agreement with Syria. But Barak was prepared to exit unilaterally, if Syria failed to come to terms.

Through the winter and spring, ambiguity surrounded Barak's commitment. Israel made no visible preparations for withdrawal, and there was confusion as to how complete the withdrawal would be. But on 5 March, the Israeli cabinet voted to depart by early July. Israel began practical preparations, and announced its willingness to withdraw to a line determined by a UN technical team. Over three days in late May, Israeli troops abruptly scampered back across the border, without sustaining casualties. Israel's client militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), collapsed immediately. On 16 June, the UN Security Council confirmed that Israel's withdrawal was complete.

In the aftermath, an uneasy equilibrium prevailed on the Israeli-Lebanese frontier. However, tensions remained high in the area of the so-called Shab'a farms. Israel had occupied this ground in 1967, and the UN regarded it as occupied Syrian territory. According to UN cartographers, Syria still had sovereignty over the Shab'a farms.[8] Lebanon, however, claimed it as Lebanese territory.

Hizballah seized this opportunity to declare the Israeli withdrawal incomplete. "So long as the Shab'a farms area remains under occupation, we can't describe what happened as a total withdrawal," announced Hasan Nasrallah, Hizballah secretary-general. "This means we have to continue our jihad to liberate this occupied area."[9] The area remained a potential flashpoint which Hizballah and Syria could ignite at will, if they were prepared to run the risk.

The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon probably had a negative impact on the concept of peace through diplomacy. It gave sustenance to the notion that Israel could be forced to make concessions through "resistance," without the need for laborious negotiations and treaties. "The way to recover our usurped rights is not through secret talks or security coordination with the usurpers," announced a Gaza weekly, "but through determined resistance, strong faith and patience."[10]

"The Lebanese example should not be generalized," a senior American diplomat told an Arab newspaper. "Attempts to draw conclusions that Hizballah's methodology should be emulated" were "extremely dangerous."[11] But before the year was out, the Palestinians seemed to have drawn precisely that conclusion.

PALESTINE REVERSAL

The collapse of negotiations with Syria brought Barak back to the Palestinian track, and to an intimate engagement with Palestinian Authority (PA) chairman Yasir 'Arafat. Barak, a former general, mounted the diplomatic equivalent of a blitzkrieg assault. He imploded faster than anyone imagined was possible, even in Israel's volatile politics. 'Arafat, a former guerrilla, launched the political equivalent of a hit-and-run, hide-and-seek campaign. He weathered the storm once again, despite the volatile politics of Palestine. By year's end, no one could say whether Israel or Palestine enjoyed the advantage. But there was no doubt which leader would pay the price of the confrontation.

Copyrighted material

PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

In the winter months, it had been business as usual. On 6–7 January, Israel turned over 5% of the West Bank to the PA, constituting the second phase of the second West Bank redeployment, as agreed upon in September 1999 at Sharm al-Shaykh (see *MECS* 1999, p. 61). But Barak and 'Arafat could not reach an agreement on the third and final Israeli redeployment, as stipulated by the Oslo II agreement (see *MECS* 1995, pp. 139–41). Barak wanted to fold it into a final agreement, whereas 'Arafat insisted on receiving a foothold in the vicinity of Jerusalem. As talks languished, 'Arafat threatened to declare a Palestinian state on 13 September, the deadline for a final status agreement. But Israel made counter-threats, and 'Arafat found no international support for a unilateral move.

On 9 March, Barak and 'Arafat met in Sharm al-Shaykh, under the baton of Egyptian president Husni Mubarak. There they committed themselves to reaching a framework agreement on permanent status (FAPS) by May, with the goal of a final agreement by September. Intensive negotiations began on 3 May in the Israeli resort of Eilat, and Israeli chief negotiator Oded Eran gave some indication of the Israeli offer. The PA would receive Gaza and three cantons constituting some two-thirds of the West Bank, linked by "safe passages." Later, more land might be transferred, putting some 80% of the West Bank in Palestinian hands. Israel would annex three major settlement blocs. The parties did not discuss Jerusalem.[12]

The Palestinians rejected this proposal and broke off the talks. American special envoy Dennis Ross then assured 'Arafat that this was not Israel's final offer, and "secret" talks were resumed in Stockholm. On 15 May, the Israeli government and Knesset voted to turn over three villages on the periphery of Jerusalem to PA control. 'Arafat would be put at the gates of Jerusalem.

But that very same day, an outbreak of violence presaged the future. On Palestinian "Nakba Day," marking the "catastrophe" of 1948, Palestinian crowds marched to Israeli checkpoints across the West Bank and Gaza. They heaved stones and petrol bombs; they were met by rubber bullets and tear gas. Fatah's armed Tanzim used live fire; so did Israeli troops. Four Palestinians died. According to one Palestinian, "there seems to be an element of truth to Israeli charges that 'Arafat and the PA leadership had a hand in encouraging the unrest," with the objective of "strengthen[ing their] negotiating position."[13] The battles subsided, but the Nakba Day violence indicated that the Palestinian leadership did not regard negotiation as its only option.

Yet Barak remained adamant about pushing forward to an "end-of-conflict, end-of-claims" agreement. He had always been critical of the incremental nature of the Oslo process. Rather than negotiate interim measures, he preferred a make-or-break, now-or-never, do-or-die negotiation. Only an American president, Barak reasoned, could bring this about, and no American president had more of a commitment to the process than Bill Clinton. Barak persuaded Clinton that enough progress had been made in Stockholm, and that he would make it worth the president's time. Clinton cornered a reluctant 'Arafat. On 5 July, Clinton called Barak and 'Arafat to a marathon summit at the presidential retreat in Camp David, Maryland. The summit opened on 11 July.

CAMP DAVID II

Camp David II was predicated on one basic assumption: neither of the parties could afford to send Clinton away empty-handed. Camp David symbolized the maximum possible investment of presidential time and prestige.[14]

Copyrighted material

Barak knew better than to send Clinton away empty-handed. He decided to make an offer at Camp David that exceeded past Israeli proposals, and put aside many old assumptions about Israeli security requirements. Israel now offered to surrender 89.5% of the West Bank. It would retain the three large settlement blocs, home to 140,000 of the estimated 180,000 settlers. In exchange for the remaining 10.5%, Israel agreed to a land swap, which would involve relinquishing uninhabited desert in Israel in exchange for the settlement blocs. (Israel initially proposed a 10:1 ratio of West Bank land for Israeli land.)[15] The Jordan Valley, long regarded by Israeli strategists as an essential security buffer, would be given to the Palestinians, but Israel would lease much of it, and keep six army bases there. According to some reports, the Palestinians replied by insisting on 97% of the West Bank, and a land swap giving them territory of comparable "size, quality, and value" to the annexed settlements. This gap was not closed at Camp David, but in accepting the notion of a land swap, the negotiators laid the foundation for agreement on the territorial issue.

But the gaps on Jerusalem and the refugees could not be bridged. Israel proposed the creation of a Palestinian city, Al-Quds (the Arabic name of Jerusalem), under Palestinian sovereignty. It would include some Palestinian-inhabited neighborhoods presently within the municipal borders of Jerusalem, as well as outlying villages. Israel offered Palestinian municipal autonomy elsewhere in Jerusalem, a "special regime" inside the Old City, and Palestinian "permanent custodianship" over the sacred places. But Israel would retain sovereignty.

'Arafat rejected all of these proposals, insisting on Palestinian sovereignty over the Arab neighborhoods and the Old City, excluding the Jewish quarter and the Western Wall, but including the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. When the depth of disagreement became clear, Clinton suggested deferring Jerusalem and going for an agreement on all other issues. But 'Arafat rejected a partial agreement. Jerusalem proved to be the prime obstacle to a framework agreement at Camp David.

But Camp David also threw another obstacle in sharp relief: Palestinian refugees. The Barak government had no objection to an unlimited influx of Palestinian refugees into the projected Palestinian state. But Israel refused to concede, on principle, any moral, legal, or political responsibility for the refugees' plight. Israel was prepared to consider reunification of families, and to contribute financially to refugee rehabilitation. But there could be no general license for several millions of Palestinians to claim the "right of return" to lands that became Israel in 1948.

Palestinians, in their turn, insisted on just that. They demanded that Israel acknowledge its (sole and full) responsibility and offer all refugees the free choice between return or compensation. Thus, Palestinians sought to reverse not only the consequences of 1967, but at least some of the consequences of 1948.

On 26 July, the summit finally ended, without an agreement. The Clinton administration decided to go public with its dissatisfaction over 'Arafat's positions. "The Israelis were more willing to be creative and flexible," said National Security Adviser Samuel Berger. The Palestinians "were not as prepared to compromise and to let go of some of their traditional positions."[16] In the past, the US had declared itself willing to accept any agreement reached by the parties. At Camp David II, the Clinton administration effectively rejected two of the most cherished "traditional positions" of the Palestinians, on Jerusalem and the refugees. Not only had Barak made his final offer; so, too, had the Clinton administration. "Labor Zionism and Pax Americana offered the Palestinians the best

Copyrighted material

that could be hoped for in a practical world," wrote American-Lebanese analyst Fouad Ajami, "and were rebuffed."[17]

Camp David II failed because only two of the three parties shared a sense of urgency. Barak, elected on a peace platform, needed an agreement for his political survival. Clinton wanted one for his "legacy." But for 'Arafat, who had made no effort to prepare his public for conceding on territory, Jerusalem and refugees, the summit looked like a trap.[18] The situation was captured by the most famous video footage to emerge from Camp David: 'Arafat and Barak dithered over who would go first through an open door, Barak seeking to push 'Arafat over the threshold. At Camp David, 'Arafat refused to be pushed through a door he had no intention of entering.

INTIFADA II

The political impact of the failure, on Barak and 'Arafat, could not have been more different. Barak came home to find his minority government in danger of imminent collapse. His critics, even within his own camp, used his Camp David concessions against him. 'Arafat, in contrast, returned to a hero's welcome. He had given nothing; Palestinian "rights" were intact. The Israelis had made unprecedented concessions, and even if they were taken off the table with the summit's failure, they established a new baseline. In fact, the Palestinians were soon urging another Camp David summit. This time, Barak and Clinton were reluctant, unless it was a "signing summit" for a done deal.[19]

But after Camp David, some Palestinians began to debate the merits of resorting to violent confrontation. In July, a Jerusalem-based reporter sympathetic to the Palestinians reported Fatah's mood in these words: "Certain Fatah leaders air the view that a clash is required for the world to intervene 'on the weaker side' to force the Israelis to address rights the Palestinians have been unable to persuade them to address through negotiations."[20] In a late July poll, 57% of Palestinians thought that a violent confrontation would win them political gains, and 63% thought that Hizballah's resistance methods should be emulated if an agreement were not reached in the coming months.[21] Hearts and minds were being prepared for an uprising, with the goal of reshuffling the political deck.

Most Israelis failed to see it coming. Talks continued, and on 25 September, Barak hosted 'Arafat at his home outside Tel Aviv. "We met with Arafat and the entire Palestinian leadership for a warm, open meeting," said Barak, "that I believe will help us in our efforts to renew the negotiations."[22] Israel's leading Arab affairs journalist wrote: "There isn't a scrap of evidence to support the claims of prophets of doom that he ['Arafat] is planning some kind of super-intifada."[23] A few weeks later, he found himself writing a column entitled "Super-Intifada" — and tracing its origins precisely to a decision by 'Arafat.[24]

On 28 September, Likud leader Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. The next day, Palestinians rioted, and Israeli police killed five in an attempt to control them. Over the following days, thousands of young Palestinians, backed up by armed members of Fatah's Tanzim organization and Palestinian police officers, marched to Israeli checkpoints in search of confrontation. There had been violent clashes between PA and Israeli forces before. This time, however, the PA worked to transform sporadic riots into a sustained uprising, which the Palestinian media immediately dubbed the al-Aqsa Intifada.

The resulting images became etched in the collective consciousness of Palestinians

Copyrighted material

and Israelis. There was the image (30 September) of a Palestinian father and his eleven-year old son pinned down by cross fire in Gaza. They were filmed crouching against a wall, with Israeli bullets flying around them. The boy was killed, the father wounded. And there was the image (12 October) of two Israeli reservists who were taken to a Palestinian police station in Ramallah, and there lynched by a crowd. A camera captured their bodies being hurled from an upstairs window. Israeli helicopter gunships retaliated by destroying targets in Ramallah and Gaza. In the first weeks, the violence also spilled over into the Israel Arab community, and thirteen Israeli Arabs were killed in clashes with the police. The battles and the funerals, all conveyed into every home in this most media-saturated of all modern conflicts, systematically dismantled the Israeli-Palestinian track.

The American fire brigade tried to quench the flames. Secretary of State Albright met with 'Arafat in Paris on 4 October; when he walked out of one session, she had to chase after him. Clinton tried his hand: on 17–18 October, he presided over an "emergency" summit in Sharm al-Shaykh. It extracted a commitment from both sides to take "immediate concrete measures to end the violence," and established an international commission, headed by former US senator George Mitchell, to investigate the causes of the violence. The establishment of the commission was to have been a ladder, allowing both sides to climb down from their confrontation. But they did not, and as the weeks wore on, the battles took on a different character. Street clashes were replaced by exchanges of gunfire. Palestinian gunmen based in PA-controlled Bayt Jala opened fire nightly on the Jewish neighborhood of Gilo in Jerusalem; Israeli forces responded with return fire and tank shells. The images evoked the battles for Jerusalem in 1948 and 1967. The uprising, which was never wholly spontaneous, became a low-intensity war between the PA and Israel.

'Arafat's role, at least at the outset, remained a disputed issue. "The hero is the one who can keep his balance on the waves," said Faysal al-Husayni, the PA's point man in Jerusalem. "But the hero is not making the waves alone. The waves are caused by more than one element — wind, temperature, the gravity of the moon. And Yasir 'Arafat maybe is one of those elements."[25] Whatever the case, 'Arafat soon developed a clear objective: extracting some unilateral Israeli concession in exchange for a cease-fire. At a minimum, Palestinians wanted "international protection," as a counter-weight to the US. But Israeli opinion was so inflamed that no Israeli government could consider "rewarding" violence. Israel responded instead with what one observer described as a "soft siege" of the PA.[26] Barak also came under siege, and as his coalition buckled beneath him, he had no choice but to seek a new mandate from the voters. On 9 December, he announced his resignation of the premiership, precipitating new elections in 2001.

(This did not end efforts to reach an agreement. On 23 December, Clinton announced his "parameters" for a settlement. The Palestinians would receive 94 to 96% of the West Bank; the remainder would be annexed by Israel, and in exchange for empty Israeli territory. Refugees would have the right to return only to the Palestinian state, but some would be allowed into Israel on humanitarian grounds. This served as the basis for another last round of negotiations in Taba, Egypt, in 2001.)

By the end of the year, at least three-hundred Palestinians and more than sixty Israelis had died in the clashes, and there was no end in sight. The violence exposed the flaws in the construction of the Oslo "peace process." Almost since its inception, the process had been criticized by extreme voices on both sides. But it was always assumed that the

Copyrighted material

original partners — the Israeli Labor Party and the PLO leadership — had some implicit understanding about where the process would end. In 2000, it turned out that they did not. The PLO leadership believed that it had made its last major concession back at Oslo. The remainder of the "peace process" would consist of a series of Israeli concessions, up to and including total Israeli withdrawal, the refugees' "right of return," and sole Palestinian control of the Haram al-Sharif. The Labor Party assumed that the "peace process" consisted of mutual concessions at every stage, and that Palestinian concessions would be forthcoming in exchange for Israeli concessions, especially on the "right of return" and the Temple Mount. The core deal of land-for-peace and a two-state solution could not be translated from principle into practice.

Israelis and Palestinians seemed destined to battle it out in a test of resolve. The outcome could not be predicted, but one thing seemed certain: conflict management, not conflict resolution, would define the next phase of Israeli-Palestinian relations. The Oslo "peace process," envisioned as an unfolding series of confidence-building measures, culminating in a "grand bargain," was finished.

ARAB PREDICAMENT

The Arab world continued to undergo generational change at the top. In 2000, Syria added a new twist, by producing a case of hereditary succession in an ostensible republic: Hafiz al-Asad was succeeded by his son Bashshar. Few observers thought this first instance would be the last. Fouad Ajami dubbed the hybrid system "ibnism" (after the word *ibn*, son). Egyptian sociologist Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim called it "republarchy" (*jumlukiya*). Whatever it was called, Syria exemplified the procedure.

SYRIAN SUCCESSION

Bashshar had been preparing for the succession for six years, yet the process was not complete on 10 April when his father died, at the age of sixty-nine. The formalities were concluded hastily. Within a few hours, the People's Assembly voted to amend the Syrian constitution, lowering the minimum age of the president from forty to thirty-four — precisely Bashshar's age. The next day, he was promoted from staff colonel to lieutenant-general, and made commander-in-chief. On 25 June, the Ba'th party congress nominated him for the presidency, and a referendum was scheduled for 10 July. A Damascus-based journalist wondered whether "the incoming president's commitment to the trappings of openness [will be] reflected in a more modest 'yes' vote at the referendum than the 99% plus approval ratings his late father routinely scored."[27] As it happened, Bashshar received a "yes" vote of 97.3%, leaving ample room for improvement.

It was remarkable that the Syrian system could continue to coexist in so intimate a proximity to the Lebanese system. Despite the heavy legacies of civil war, Israeli occupation, and Syrian hegemony, Lebanon still managed to practice something that remotely resembled democracy. Its press showed some pluck, and the Lebanese electorate could surprise, as it did in parliamentary elections held in two stages over the summer. Rafiq al-Hariri, who had served as prime minister from 1992 to 1998, staged a spectacular comeback against incumbent Salim al-Huss. He and his loyalists swept the election, and he became prime minister on 26 October, forming a broad-based thirty-member cabinet, supported by 106 delegates in the 128-member parliament. No one had any illusions

Copyrighted material

about Hariri (a cross between a CEO and a Saudi prince), or about the limits of Lebanese "democracy." Still, Lebanon had moved a step toward a plural order.

THE IMMOVABLE STATE

Egypt, by contrast, gravitated toward a Pharaonic one. The Islamists had already been defeated, and there were no terrorist acts in 2000. The regime was free to turn upon its other critics.

In the run-up to parliamentary elections in Egypt, authorities arrested Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, whose Cairo-based Ibn Khaldun Center planned to monitor the vote for irregularities. The indictment and trial of the Arab world's most internationally prominent social scientist, reflected the determination of the regime to intimidate critics of all stripes, not just Islamists. The elections delivered 87% of the seats in the new People's Assembly to the ruling National Democratic Party.[28]

As for the Islamists, the so-called "second wave" of Islamism had washed over the Arab world without effecting any regime change. Rulers continued to consolidate their grip, and some even felt sufficiently confident to amnesty Islamist opponents. In Morocco, Islamist leader Abdessalame Yassine was released from house arrest. In Algeria, the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), the armed wing of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), disbanded itself, and members took advantage of a government amnesty. In Syria, the regime amnestied 380 imprisoned Muslim Brethren, including twenty who were serving life sentences. Amnesties were the clearest proof that the Islamists no longer frightened the denizens of the palaces.

True, Usama bin Ladin, the Saudi extremist who had taken refuge in Afghanistan, still had cells in some Arab countries. But he did not expend energies trying to overthrow regimes. Instead, he targeted the Americans. On 12 October, suicide bombers in a dinghy blew a gaping hole in an American destroyer, the USS Cole, in the Yemeni port of Aden, killing seventeen sailors. Bin Ladin remained a thorn in the side of the US, but he would only become a top priority after 11 September 2001, when his operatives attacked America itself.

The US worried more about the efforts of Saddam Husayn to break the grip of UN sanctions, as a sequel to his earlier elimination of UN weapons inspections. Most notably, Iraq managed to break up the air embargo, a weak link in the sanctions system. Russia, France and Jordan sent in "humanitarian" flights, later followed by commercial flights. By year's end, flights to and from Saddam International Airport had become routine. A new American administration would have to make difficult choices about the eroding sanctions regime.[29]

IRAN AND TURKEY: MODELS UNDER STRESS

Iran and Turkey continued to provide a striking contrast to the Arab world. Both had open political systems, characterized by contested elections and robust parliamentary life. Yet both came under great stress in 2000, as they struggled to come to terms with needed reforms.

IRANIAN REFORMISTS AT BAY

Whenever Iranian voters went to the polls, they consistently cast their ballots for reform. The parliamentary elections of 18 February were no exception. Some 80% of 38.7m.

Copyrighted material

eligible voters participated, casting ballots for five thousand candidates who contested 290 Majlis seats. The reformists, comprised of the left-wing Mosharekat (led by Khatami's brother) and the centrist Kargozaran (formed around former president Rafsanjani), swept the poll. After a run-off election on 5 May, the reformists commanded about two hundred seats in the Majlis.

But whenever the reformists swept the polls, the conservatives mobilized the judiciary to silence them. On 23 April, the courts invoked a new law to crack down on the press. Police closed twelve newspapers and periodicals; another two were closed on 27 April. Later closures brought the total to some thirty reformist publications. In the autumn, the courts rounded up seventeen reformists who had participated in a Berlin conference on the political future of Iran, and put them on trial. Attempts by Majlis reformists to reverse the conservative drive failed.[30]

The power struggle in Iran fed a never-ending debate in the West, and especially in Washington, over how best to encourage the cause of reform. The result was a policy of mixed signals. On 17 March, Secretary of State Albright gave an address announcing the lifting of import restrictions on Iranian carpets and foodstuffs. She also described the CIA-backed overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953 as "a setback for Iran's political development."[31] Yet the State Department continued to list Iran as the foremost state sponsor of terrorism. Any change in US-Iranian relations would have to await some unforeseeable shift in Iran, or in the Middle East.

TURKEY IN OVERDRAFT

Turkey lurched from crisis to crisis — first, political, and then, financial. These were the result of the country's chronic inability to effect reforms.

On 12 January, the ruling coalition agreed to suspend the execution of Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the outlawed Parti Kerkeren Kurdistan (PKK; Kurdish Workers' Party), pending a ruling from the European Court of Human Rights. It was a measure that endeared Turkey to the European Union (EU), the club Turkey hoped to join. But on 19–20 February, three Kurdish mayors were arrested for alleged affiliations with the PKK. The arrests drew a wave of criticism from Europe and even the US, and the mayors were released and reinstated after nine days of detention. Despite the defeat of the PKK, Turkey had yet to stabilize a new policy on the Kurds.

In the spring, the question of extending the presidency of Süleyman Demirel preoccupied Turkish political life. The seventy-five-year-old Demirel, who had been a domineering president, represented the old guard of Turkish politics; his friends had come and gone, but his enemies had accumulated. His eight-year term stood to end on 16 May. Only a constitutional amendment, requiring a three-fifths majority of parliament, could prolong it. Turkish prime minister Bülent Ecevit favored the extension, and the issue became a test of his ability to marshal his ruling coalition.

In the end, Ecevit failed: the parliament rejected the proposed amendment, and on 5 May, it elected a new president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, head of the Constitutional Court and a fallback candidate nominated at the last minute by Ecevit. Many thought Sezer, lacking a political base, would adopt a lower profile than Demirel, and that he favored a more ceremonial presidency. They were wrong. The president defied the prime minister over every controversial issue, from civil service dismissals to bank privatization. Ecevit and Sezer eventually became the two opposite poles of Turkish politics. Their spats created the impression that no one was in charge.

Copyrighted material

In October, the Turkish banking regulatory board took over ten insolvent banks, and assumed their obligations. Thus began a rolling financial crisis that exposed all of the flaws of Turkey's political and economic system. Word soon spread that other banks had bad loans, and in November, a run on the banks drained $6bn. out of Turkey almost overnight. The crisis of confidence spread to the stock market, which fell by 40% in two weeks. Under US prodding, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stepped in, pledging a $7.5bn. loan on 6 December. Turkey had a young, dynamic, and entrepreneurial population, and a sclerotic, plodding, and corrupt political system. By year's end, the country was closer than ever to experiencing another coup—this one, by the IMF.

NOTES

For the place and frequency of publications cited here, and for the full name of the publication, news agency, radio station or monitoring service where an abbreviation is used, please see "List of Sources."

1. Robert Satloff and Patrick Clawson, "The US Draft Treaty for Syria-Israel Peace: A Textual Analysis," *Peacewatch*, No. 242 (14 January 2000).
2. This issue was summarized by Frederic C. Hof and Patrick Clawson, "Who Will Control the Shore and Waters of the Galilee?," *Peacewatch*, No. 254 (13 April 2000).
3. Robert Satloff, "Syria's Critique of the US Draft Treaty: A Textual Analysis," *Peacewatch*, No. 243 (27 January 2000).
4. Ross Dunn, "Assad's Price is the Return of Galilee Shore," *The Times*, 29 March, and *JR*, 24 April 2000, quoting transcript of the talk as broadcast by MBC.
5. Quoted by Jane Perlez, "Clinton Says Next Move for Peace Is Assad's," *NYT*, 29 March 2000.
6. Journalist Patrick Seale, ever-sympathetic to the Syrian position, admitted that "Syria's negotiating style — its stiffness, its refusal to engage in public relations, its scornful neglect of Israeli domestic opinion — must also bear some part of the blame for failure....Damascus has refused to make the gestures which might have softened the Israeli public's deep distrust." Patrick Seale, "Obituary of the Syrian Track," *MEI*, 19 May 2000.
7. Quoted in *JR*, 8 May 2000.
8. Ranwa Yehia, "Farms Foreshadow Withdrawal," *AW*, 18 May 2000.
9. Nasrallah interview in *al-Wasat* (no date given), via *MM*, 30 May 2000.
10. *Al-Istiqlal*, quoted by Khalid Amayreh, "Hizbullah vs. Arafat," *MEI*, 2 June 2000.
11. Aaron Miller, quoted by Lamis Andoni, "The Washington Spin," *MEI*, 2 June 2000.
12. Leslie Susser, "The Carrot of Statehood," *JR*, 5 June 2000.
13. Khalid Amayreh, "The Territories Erupt," *MEI*, 19 May 2000.
14. This summary relies on the few published accounts available at the time of this writing, including Leslie Susser and Isabel Kershner, "The Tragedy of Errors," *JR*, 16 July 2001; and Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors," *New York Review of Books*, 9 August 2001.
15. According to Agha and Malley, "Camp David," Israel offered 91% of the West Bank.
16. Donald Neff, "The US Piles on the Pressure," *MEI*, 18 August 2000.
17. Fouad Ajami, "Intifada: The Future as History," *US News & World Report*, 4 June 2001.
18. David Makovsky, "Arafat's Resistance to a Summit," *Peacewatch*, No. 267 (28 June 2000).
19. Leslie Susser, "Heading for a Second Summit?," *JR*, 28 August 2000.
20. Graham Usher, "The 'Make or Break' Summit," *MEI*, 14 July 2000.
21. Jamil Hilal, "Polls Apart: Israeli and Palestinian Public Opinion after Camp David," *MEI*, 1 September 2000.

Copyrighted material

22. Deborah Sontag, "Arafat's Visit to Barak's Place Broke the Ice, Both Sides Say," *NYT*, 26 September 2000.
23. He also added that "Mubarak of Egypt confirms this adamantly." Ehud Ya'ari, "Less for Less in Jerusalem," *JR*, 25 September. Another journalist ruled out "another intifada, a regression to the black days of closed schools and shops and daily casualties on the firing line. There are too many factors mitigating against it." Hirsh Goodman, "Oslo Osmosis," *JR*, 10 October 2000. (This issue of the weekly was published just before the outbreak of the intifada.)
24. Ehud Ya'ari, "Super-Intifada," *JR*, 23 October 2000.
25. Quoted by Lee Hockstader, "Arafat: Missing in Action," *WP*, 22 October 2000.
26. Ehud Ya'ari, "Soft Siege," *JR*, 6 November 2000.
27. "Consolidating Bashar," *MEI*, 14 July 2000.
28. Amy W. Hawthorne, "Egyptian Elections: Rumblings of Change, But NDP Dominance Maintained," *Policywatch*, No. 506 (27 November 2000).
29. Nicholas Lehmann, "The Iraq Factor," *The New Yorker*, 22 January 2001.
30. Michael Rubin, "The Ebb and Flow of Reform in Iran," *Policywatch*, No. 459 (1 May 2000).
31. Text of Albright speech, *MM*, 20 March 2000.

Copyrighted material